



**ENGINEERING  
PROGRAM IN TECHNICAL  
COMMUNICATION**  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

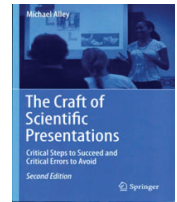
# Designing PowerPoint Slides

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**Disclaimer:** *The Program in Technical Communication tries to ensure that the information is provided on this website is helpful and accurate. It is important to recognize that the content provided are general and that satisfying the requirements of specific contexts, such as classroom assignments or workplace situations, may involve some modification, supplementation, or adaptation.*

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# Designing PowerPoint Slides



To learn even more about designing good PP slides, see *The Craft of Scientific Presentations* by Michael Alley.

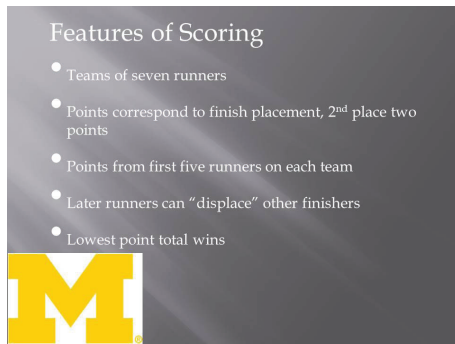
Many engineers use the default settings in PowerPoint when designing slides, which often leads to ineffective slides. Often, these ineffective slides rely on text and are over-designed with unnecessary embellishments and decoration. These ineffective slides then appear in a medium that is better suited for displaying visuals.

Below, a common way of designing slides (left column, using default settings) is compared with a better way (right column) that emphasizes visuals over text.

ineffective



Title slide, 4:3 ratio, PP default



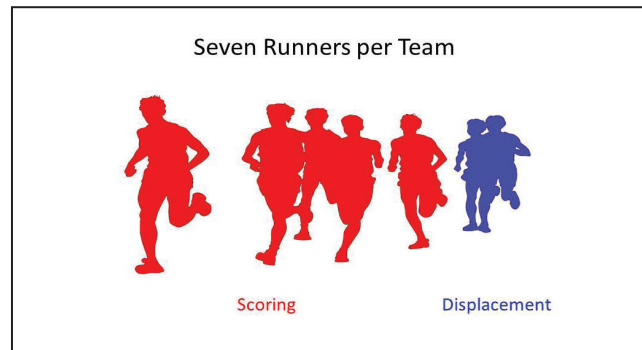
Interior slide, 4:3 ratio

1. Screen size is the 4:3 ratio default in PowerPoint. Some older projection systems use a 4:3 ratio, but newer ones are set for widescreen
2. Templates encourage many non-data pixels; decoration instead of data.
3. Title slide has text only, no visual of topic.
4. Overbranding on all slides; contributes to many non-data pixels,

effective



Title slide, 16:9 ratio, widescreen



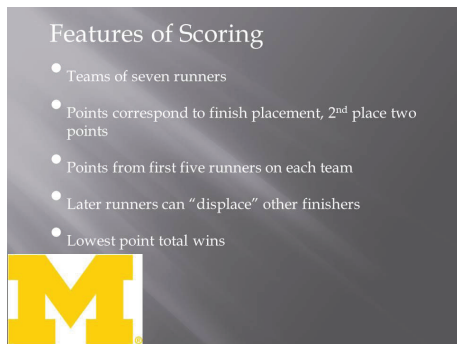
Interior slide, 16:9 ratio

1. Screen size is 16:9 (or 16:10) widescreen. Many current screens are widescreen, so set your slide dimensions to match.
2. No template. A blank slide is the best starting point.
3. Title and visual on title slide. The title, as an option, can make an assertion that the presentation supports.
4. Branding, if used, subtle, only on title slide. Audiences do not need to be reminded of author affiliation.

ineffective



Title slide, 4:3 ratio, PP default



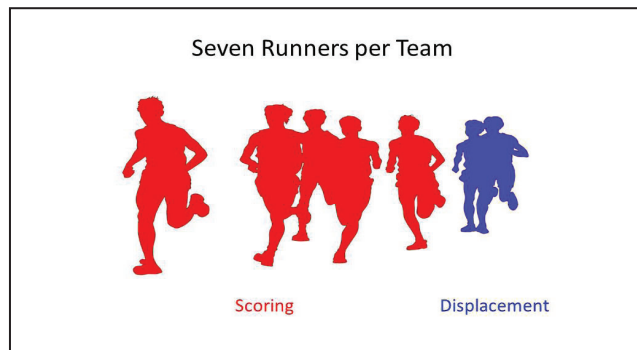
Interior slide, 4:3 ratio

5. Generous use of bullet lists. Giving audiences text to read interferes with listening to the presenter (reading and listening are processed on the same side of the brain).
6. Interior slides are mostly text. Easier to type text than take the effort to find or create useful visuals.
7. Clip art. Cheesy, sub-optimal.
8. Low-resolution (fuzzy) visuals. Often downloaded.
9. Presenter reads from slides. Reveals a lack of rehearsal and unfamiliarity with the topic.
10. No handout that documents the presentation for the audience. Default printout of slides has poor resolution as visuals are reduced in size.

effective



Title slide, 16:9 ratio, widescreen



Interior slide, 16:9 ratio

5. No bullet points. Visuals instead. OK to have some text, as in labels or an assertion at the top, left of the slide. That assertion is supported by visual evidence. Visuals are processed by our brains differently than reading and listening, so we can process visuals while listening to presenters.
6. Mostly visuals. Visuals for a visual medium (slides).
7. Original art, photos.
8. High-resolution visuals. Original or from image libraries.
9. Presenter does not focus on screen, looks at audience. Reveals rehearsal and familiarity with the topic.
10. Paper handout (one sheet, duplexed?) with takeaways of the presentation. Can add notes to slides in the Normal mode of PP. Handouts accommodate people unable to attend the presentation and attendees who want copies. These post-presentation audiences view the slides/handout **without** listening to the live presenter.